

THE BROWN HOMESTEAD

The John Brown House Statement of Significance

Description of Historic Place

The John Brown House, located at 1317 Pelham Road across from Short Hills Provincial Park, sits on approximately 4.8 acres of land in the city of St. Catharines. This two-storey Reynales Rockway Dolomite limestone building was designed in the Georgian style and constructed between 1802 to 1804. The building incorporated an earlier one-and-a-half storey building, built of similar limestone, around 1796. A subsequent addition was constructed in the 1920s.

The John Brown House is currently designated under Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act* by the City of St. Catharines By-law No. 2019-317.

Statement of Cultural Heritage Value or Interest

Design or Physical Value:

The John Brown House is architecturally significant for its early Loyalist Georgian style, including notable characteristics such as its symmetrical five bay facade and wide centre hall plan. It is also the only existing example in Niagara of a house built entirely from Reynales Rockway Dolomite limestone.

The house includes several other architecturally significant features, including an original black walnut staircase and handrail with hepplewhite style gallery on the upstairs landing. Other significant features include original six-panel Georgian doors, Loyalist moulding, original paint and stenciling samples in the dining room, six original fireplaces, and the remains and markings of a pivoting birdcage bar from the tavern era. A decorative plaster cornice and central ceiling rose were added to the parlour during the Victorian era.

Historical or Associative Value:

The John Brown House is historically significant as the oldest house in the City of St. Catharines, and one of the few remaining United Empire Loyalist homes in Niagara. The land was originally settled circa 1785 by John Brown, a Butler's Ranger of German descent from the Schoharie Valley. The original 1-and-a-half storey building is significant for helping John complete his settlement duties, leading to the ratification of his initial 600-acre land grant in 1797 (he was later granted an additional 300 acres). The grand, two-storey Georgian house, which incorporated the first structure, was

constructed prior to Brown's death in 1804. Sons Adam and Abraham Brown inherited the house and 436 acres of John Brown's land.

The house is also historically significant as an early Niagara tavern and inn, which began under Adam Brown's sole ownership in 1809. Its location on early routes and roadways, including the Mohawk Trail, Brown-Decew Road, contributed to its use and to its value as one of the stops along the Dundas-Niagara Stagecoach Line, which began operation in 1816. The house remained a tavern until at least the late 1830s, and after its closing, Henry Smith (also known as Henry of Pelham) opened his tavern less than a mile up Pelham Road in 1842.

The John Brown House is also historically significant for its use by the Canadian military during the First World War when it was owned by Lafontaine Baldwin Powers. While the troops conducted drills in the orchard (now part of Short Hills Provincial Park across Pelham Road), officers would gather in the upstairs master bedroom to observe and direct the exercises, sometimes joined by Canada's Minister of Militia and Defense, Sir Sam Hughes.

The house remained in the Powers family until 1979 when it was sold, along with an approximately one-acre lot to heritage resource consultant, Jon Jouppien. It was Jouppien's recognition of the house's historic significance which led to the City of St. Catharines enacting designation by-laws protecting the building in 1982. John Brown Heritage Foundation, a registered Canadian charity dedicated to reimagining historic sites, purchased the property in 2015 to ensure the house's continued conservation.

Contextual Value:

Still surrounded by parklands and vineyards, the John Brown House's physical or design and historical or associative value is enhanced by its contextual setting, which retains the character of an early farming property. The house has had a continuous and vibrant life in the Niagara Region since its construction. Located at the southwestern corner of St. Catharines, where the cities of St. Catharines and Thorold and the Town of Pelham meet, there is even evidence to suggest the house may have been located in Thorold prior to the alteration of the Concession lines in the late 1820s. It is now a rare example of the region's earliest settlements and Loyalist rural heritage at the edge of the City of St. Catharines' urban expansion.

Character Defining Elements

Exterior features that contribute to the physical or design value of the John Brown House include:

- Early Loyalist Georgian style architecture;
- Symmetrical five bay façade;
- Narrow hall windows independent of the front door frame structure;
- Only existing example in Niagara of a house built entirely from Reynales Rockway Dolomite limestone;
- Stone lug sills on front façade windows;

- Uncharacteristically low roof line; and
- 19th century brick dairy and smoke house.

Interior features that contribute to the architectural value of the John Brown House include:

- Wide centre hall plan;
- Original black walnut staircase and handrail with hepplewhite style gallery;
- Original floor stenciling in centre hall;
- Tongue and groove hardwood flooring;
- Old growth hand hewn floor joists;
- Original Loyalist moulding;
- Evidence of an early canvas floor cloth in the dining room;
- Counter support structure and markings for pivoting birdcage panel and shelving remaining from the tavern era;
- Original paint and stenciling samples in the dining room;
- Six panel front door with delicate Loyalist panel moulds;
- Six panel Loyalist parlour door with original Victorian oak graining;
- Original Victorian plaster cornice and central ceiling rose;
- Large ballroom space on upper floor featuring more formal trim and paneling under windows;
- Painted, beaded wainscot partition to the attic; and
- Six original fireplaces.

Characteristics that contribute to the contextual value of the John Brown House include:

- Picturesque location in proximity to and with views of the Short Hills Provincial Park and vineyards;
- Location at the southwestern corner of St. Catharines, where the cities of St. Catharines and Thorold and the Town of Pelham meet.